

The Harmonious Entrepreneurship Online Global Student Competition: an example of meaningful extracurricular entrepreneurship education.

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Abstract

The article presents the findings of an extracurricular online beta test of a competition between students of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the International University of Malaya-Wales. The competition is intended to promote the concept of Harmonious Entrepreneurship and the creation of student led Harmonious Enterprises that address the global sustainability challenge and deliver a triple bottom line in which profit, people, and planet are in harmony. It reveals that extracurricular learning can attract students from disciplines other than business and can educate the participants, both staff and students, not just about Harmonious Entrepreneurship but how to identify and launch an innovative Harmonious Enterprise that addresses a sustainability challenge. The test identifies how the competition may be improved prior to its global launch and makes recommendations for students, educators and mentors and providers and universities as to how it might best be implemented. Once revised and launched the competition will be further tested to better understand how extracurricular learning can help advance the delivery of both entrepreneurship and sustainability education in universities and colleges around the globe.

Key Words

Harmonious Entrepreneurship; Online Competition; Extracurricular; Entrepreneurship Education

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Introduction

The aim of the research on which this chapter is based is to explore how entrepreneurship education can help address the global sustainability challenge currently facing the planet. It does so by presenting the findings of a beta test of an online international extracurricular student competition intended to introduce and implement a systemic new concept, Harmonious Entrepreneurship, developed specifically to address the sustainability challenge (Kirby and El-Kaffass, 2021). This proposed solution is exemplified by SEKEM Holding in Egypt (Kirby & El-Kaffass, 2022), an award-winning enterprise that *“shows how a modern business can combine profitability and engagements in world markets with a humanistic and spiritual approach to people and a respect for the natural environment”*.

The thinking behind it is that the planet is a system and as such is composed of several interconnected subsystems, of which the economic, environmental, and human or social subsystems are perhaps the most significant. In accordance with systems theory, this means that if one subsystem is impacted, the others will be affected. Accordingly, it is not possible to resolve the Sustainability Challenge by addressing just one aspect of it as has been the case to date. Rather, in accordance with Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety (Ashby, 1968), the solution has to be as complex as the problem itself. This means addressing all of the involved or interconnected subsystems. So, in order to impact the Sustainability Challenge Entrepreneurship has to produce a holistic, systemic solution that integrates economic, eco, humane, and social entrepreneurship, rather than continuing to

implement them separately, thereby producing a triple bottom line business model (Elkington, 1999) in which profit, planet, and people are in harmony. To affect this, however, it is also necessary to revisit Friedman's (1970) doctrine that the social responsibility of business is to satisfy shareholders by “making as much money as possible”. All too frequently this thinking has dominated both theory and practice over the past 50 years, if not longer. Indeed, the search for wealth has often been at the expense of people and the planet, thereby contributing to the present crisis if not being responsible for it (Kirby et al., 2022a).

In 2020, the present authors (Kirby and Healey-Benson) founded the Harmonious Entrepreneurship Society (<https://harmonious-entrepreneurship.org/>) to promote and implement the concept. Since then, the concept has been further developed with the creation of a bespoke educational online course, along with the production of over 100 start-up cases which serve as examples of the concept. Together with the original concept and other papers, these have been the online inputs for a virtual, international inter-university student enterprise competition. The latter is intended not just to raise awareness of the concept but to create innovative graduate-led harmonious new ventures that address an aspect of the Sustainability Challenge. It is intended to launch the competition globally once the necessary iterations have been made.

For the purposes of this research the 1987 United Nations Brundtland¹ definition of sustainability is adopted together with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were developed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

The Competition

While there has been, and is, criticism of business planning competitions in extracurricular entrepreneurship education (Watson et al., 2014), they have been found to provide a range of benefits to participants other than the development of entrepreneurial know-how and skills. These include access to mentors, opportunity for networking and increased self-confidence, and risk-taking propensity (Russell et al., 2008). It was for this reason that the competition format was selected, coupled with the belief that the competitive structure motivates students to actively participate and fully immerse themselves in the process. This kind of activity-driven, engaging environment encourages better comprehension and retention of principles and ideas. It creates an energetic space where learning is self-driven and curiosity is sparked, a far cry from passive, lecture-based learning. Additionally, in the competitive landscape, students are challenged to innovate and think creatively to solve real-world problems. This fosters an essential skill set for any entrepreneur - the ability to think “outside of the box”, to navigate complex challenges, and to devise effective, innovative solutions. Moreover, as students strive to win (to be competitive), they learn also to create ventures that uphold ethical standards, contribute positively to society, and respect the environment - the competition actively promotes ethical innovation, positive change, and sustainable development.

Additionally, it is anticipated that while the students may be extrinsically motivated to participate initially, they are likely to become intrinsically motivated once involved.

Aim

The competition is intended to encourage teams of university students and their mentors to learn about sustainability and how to launch a Harmonious Entrepreneurial venture. Each team is required to generate an innovative business idea capable of being transformed into a new venture that will address the sustainability challenge. Participants in the programme learn experientially, acquiring both generic and specific skills. Generic skills include the ability to identify and solve management problems, work effectively in teams, organise, and manage oneself, collect, analyse, and evaluate information, communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and reflect on their learning. Specific skills include identifying harmonious solutions to sustainability challenges, formulating compelling proposals, and executing with support. The venture should adopt a holistic approach, covering economic, environmental, humane, and social aspects. It is vital to uphold Elkington's (1999) triple bottom line of profit, planet, and people, while also targeting multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals. As explained by Kirby and El-Kaffass (2021), the vision for the future of the venture should be based on ethical innovation and lead to positive change and improvement in the economy and society without causing harm to people or the environment. This vision should result in long-term and sustainable development. Furthermore, the venture should meet the Harmonious Entrepreneurship PROSPER requirement of being: -

- **Professionally based:** taking state-of-the-art quality measures to develop, improve and grow the business,
- **Spiritually and ethically inspired:** emanating from a principle of doing good on earth – benefit the environment and the wholeness of the world, ensuring equilibrium and justice and sustaining the initial harmony of the universe.

- **Physically/materially concerned:** supporting improvement in the health and wellbeing of people and the physical environment, including air, earth, seas and space.
- **Emotionally rooted:** serving and benefitting the community.
- **Rationally and Intellectually based:** creative and innovative, finding smart and novel solutions.

Case examples of the intended types of new ventures are provided at <https://harmonious-entrepreneurship.org/>.

Structure

The competition operates as a self-directed experiential learning programme, utilising online resources and select on-demand workshops. It echoes the point made by Diaz-Iso et al. (2019, p.1) that students should engage “with peers and instructors who can create environments of support and trust”. Participants are encouraged to form multidisciplinary teams of six. Within these teams, up to two members may be academics serving as mentors.

Prior to embarking on the formal stages of the competition, teams are required to undertake several preparatory steps. These include acquainting themselves with the work of Kirby and El-Kaffass (2021) and the publication by HRH The Prince of Wales et al. (2010). A fundamental understanding of Harmonious Entrepreneurship is crucial. This can be attained through the designated online course, which offers an introduction to the sustainability challenge and emphasises the UN's SDGs, helping foster creative, innovative thinking and problem-solving. Additionally, teams are encouraged to explore the extensive collection of case studies available on

the Harmonious Entrepreneurship website. Registration with the HES competition administration under a unique team name is mandatory. Teams are also expected to attend an online introductory webinar, which not only provides an overview of the competition and the Harmonious Entrepreneurship concept but also imparts live and recorded insights from practitioners and role models on venture research, initiation, and the journey of student/graduate entrepreneurship.

In *Part 1* of the competition, teams generate an idea for a sustainable business venture and submit a short written proposal outlining how it meets the competition criteria. The proposal should describe the idea, demonstrate how it meets the Harmonious Entrepreneurship criteria, explain its originality or improvement on existing solutions, consider implementation strategies, identify potential challenges, and provide solutions, and demonstrate the team's knowledge and skills to make the idea work.

Each team receives written feedback on its proposal based on the views of the judging panel and the six teams adjudged to have produced the most innovative and feasible proposals are invited to meet with the judges for further oral feedback before entering phase 2. If the idea is based on an invention, the team must demonstrate that it owns the intellectual property and does not infringe any existing intellectual property protection rights.

Part 2 of the competition requires each team to develop an outline business plan for their sustainable venture. The plan should demonstrate the commercial feasibility of the proposal and identify funding requirements. The evaluation of the proposals will be based on a written document and a 30-minute oral presentation, which includes a question-and-answer session.

The report should include an Executive Summary, which is a one-page synopsis of the business plan. Additionally, the report should provide details about the team, including their experience and skills, as well as their roles in the venture. It should also include information about the business proposition, such as its name, legal status, and a brief description of the idea. Furthermore, the report should outline the competitive advantage of the idea, including who the target market is and how the venture will generate revenue. The report should also demonstrate how the venture addresses the sustainability challenge, identifying which UN SDGs it will contribute to achieving. Finally, the report should include a reflection on what the team has learned throughout the competition process, including working in teams, generating ideas, understanding the sustainability challenge, harmonious entrepreneurship, and business planning.

The oral presentation should be clear, concise, and comprehensive, taking the form of a pitch for funding. Teams should identify the problem to be solved and demonstrate how the proposed solution will address it. They should also explain the business model and show how the venture will produce a triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet. Realistic financials should be presented, demonstrating an understanding of the associated costs and indicative profit margins. Teams should also explain what funding is needed and how it will be repaid.

Each of the participating teams receives a certificate of participation and in addition the six finalist teams receive a certificate of recognition while the first three winning teams are awarded a cash prize to be used to help launch the venture and are offered a place in a virtual incubator and further mentoring.

Outcomes

The competition has been beta tested between students at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David² and the University of Malaya–Wales³ Two different approaches were adopted. In UWTSD the competition was integrated into a business studies programme that required the students to develop a sustainability-oriented start-up project, the lecturer creating the teams. In contrast, in Malaysia, the projects were completely extracurricular and not formally linked to any one programme, the students, from Arts and Science, Biotechnology, Business and Computer Science, forming their own teams. As the competition was part of a module, none of the UWTSD teams had a mentor in contrast to the extracurricular Malaysian teams, each of which had at least one.

In total, 18 teams (71 participants) registered and participated in phase 1, nine from each university. All of them were single disciplinary teams and all addressed a sustainability problem as required. The written submissions were, in the main, original, and thorough but the judging panel was able to select six proposals, for phase 2, that were both innovative and commercially feasible potentially. As it so happened, 3 were from each institution.

In phase 2 none of the teams requested further advice or guidance and only one reflected in any detail on what the team had learned. Even then, their reflections were vague and generalised. They included such statements as: -

“We learned about different elements needed in order to run a business”.

“We have learnt that being incredibly organised is critical”.

“We also learned a lot more on business terms that need to be planned out in order to start a business”.

“We learned skills at a young age that will help us to improve and stay ahead of the competition”.

Given the specific instruction that the teams received such a response suggests a lack of student familiarity with the exercise, especially when coupled with the lack of a response from the other finalists. Students are not required to reflect on their learning, and when they do the focus is on cognition rather than skill or competence development.

All of the written reports were very detailed demonstrating considerable effort but were assignments rather than business plans. Similarly, the oral presentations tended to be over- lengthy and did not pitch for funding but summarised the findings. Despite this, the participants clearly enjoyed the exercise and learned from it. Typical student comments were: -

“I learned a lot about business and the entrepreneurial world from the start until the end process of this competition”. (Biotech student)

“Initially gaining experience was one of my reasons for joining the competition. However, throughout this journey, I found that communication and collaboration between individuals are significantly important to complete any task effectively”.
(Business Administration Student)

“We learned that a startup or business is not only about getting profit, but also about how to contribute back to the planet and society”. (Computer Science Student)

Based on the written and oral presentations the judging panel made awards to the three Malaysian teams.⁴

Discussion

Clearly the competition needs fine-tuning before its global launch. This was the reason for the beta test. However, the test also revealed some valuable lessons in terms of teaching harmonious entrepreneurship extramurally.

First, one of the initial challenges faced by participants was to understand, thoroughly, the competition's requirements and criteria. It became evident that emphasising the importance of adhering to deadlines and word limits was crucial for a streamlined process. A foundational aspect of the competition was introducing participants to core concepts. This included sustainability, entrepreneurship, and, most importantly, the innovative paradigm of harmonious entrepreneurship. As one mentor acknowledged *“I have a better understanding of the actual concept and framework of harmonious entrepreneurship and how it impacts society and environment. I believe it shall be applied and integrated in teaching and learning as well as research projects for the students and myself to explore and design more ideas in the future”.*

Secondly, self-directed learning needs to be managed. Students cannot be capable of diagnosing their learning needs and formulating their learning goals if they are

unaware of what needs to be learned. The organisers offered on-demand workshops and counselling, but no requests were received, suggesting that the participants believed they knew all that was needed. Clearly, the mentors can play a role but if they are learning also their contribution is somewhat limited. As the IUMW Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, Associate Professor Dr Nurul Nisa Omar, recognised “*the lecturers themselves are exposed to areas in which they may not be specialised given the multi-disciplinary requirements of the competition*”. Under such circumstances it would appear that the programme organisers need to negotiate a learning contract (Laycock & Stephenson, 1993; Anderson et al., 1996) with each team to ensure they learn what is required of them. According to one mentor “*working with the students has made me realise the importance of seeding their entrepreneurial mindset at a very young age, so they can see and plan what they can do...Personally, I learned how to develop a business proposal and am creating my own template to help others*”.

Third, the involvement of academic mentors was pivotal. Their primary role was to guide, motivate, and ensure that the students were on track. However, it was crucial that they did not take over the students' work, preserving the essence of student-led initiatives. In the opinion of another mentor “*the competition allows me to motivate my students by giving them some real case scenario of challenges in achieving the sustainable development goals*”, while the students recognised that “*without guidance from our lecturer we may have lost track of what was supposed to be done on developing our proposal*” and “*both lecturers provided the optimum encouragement, guidance and support in this competition*”.

Fourth, the participants benefitted from learning experientially. As the competition progressed, the participants were seen to develop and enhance various

entrepreneurial skills among participants. These ranged from creativity and problem-solving to team building, leadership, and strategic thinking. The competition became a crucible for honing these vital enterprise competences. Participants were not just theorising; they were identifying real-world problems, generating innovative ideas, planning for implementation, and continuously reflecting on their journey. According to one mentor the *“students feel motivated to address the sustainability issues since they have great chances to apply their knowledge by establishing their own SDG driven business”*. As Confucius said *“I hear, and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand”*. According to Associate Professor Dr Omar, the competition *“actually opened up a deeper consideration into how the current module and learning structure is designed and the potential for improving it”*.

Fifth, feedback and reflection emerged as pivotal components of the competition. Participants proactively engaged with academic mentors and industry experts to garner insights, which significantly refined their entrepreneurial concepts. Whilst reflection is recognised as vital in Higher Education, especially in experiential learning and cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural engagements (Veine et al., 2020), feedback suggests that students might not frequently practise this in their degree programmes. This observation underscores the need for organisers to emphasise and facilitate reflection within the competition. As Preedy et al.(2018, p.28 concluded, extracurricular activities greatly benefit from additional built-in reflection components

Finally, while it is crucial to align the project with the broader University ecosystem, as advocated by Mason et al. (2020), evidence indicates that integrating the project into the curriculum may not be ideal. The necessity for teams to have staff mentors

might conflict with university degree regulations. Additionally, there is an observed trend where students predominantly engage in activities directly contributing to their degree classification, often overlooking non-contributing extracurricular initiatives. The competition seeks participants wanting to not only understand Harmonious Entrepreneurship but also to initiate a harmonious enterprise. It is essential that enrolment is not driven solely, therefore, by degree qualifications. The competition's core ethos is to educate for Harmonious Entrepreneurship, rather than about it and to develop in the participants the attributes of an enterprising person. Both the prize funding and feedback from the judging panel echo this objective.

Conclusion

In 2016, Vyakarana called for entrepreneurship education to be meaningful and asked “*what is wrong with doing well from doing good?* ”. The answer is “nothing” and Harmonious Entrepreneurship demonstrates how it might be achieved and how it is possible for entrepreneurship to shift from a focus on wealth creation to sustainable development (Kirby et al., 2022a). Introducing students and staff to the concept, however, is the problem not least as there is still resistance to the incorporation of entrepreneurship education into the curriculum (Kirby et al., 2022b).

The competition has demonstrated not just a theoretical argument for the importance of Harmonious Entrepreneurship, but a concrete example of how it can be fostered in practice. It serves to bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing tangible insights for educators interested in incorporating Harmonious Entrepreneurship into their teaching. By exploring the dynamics of the competition

and the learning it imparts, the study underscores the value and efficacy of such extracurricular experiential learning activities in fostering a holistic view of entrepreneurship.

Specifically, in response to the call from Beaumont et al. (2016) that enterprise educators consider how they can attract and deliver entrepreneurship education to students from a more diverse range of discipline areas, the competition has demonstrated that it is possible to attract participants from disciplines other than business administration especially if it is integrated into what Mason et al. (2020) refer to as “*the broader University ecosystem*”. The problem arises when either there is not an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the institution, or a comprehensive system already exists and has done for some time. In either case, the institution’s students may be involved, already, in other, established in-house and external competitions⁵. In many cases, however, the primary focus of such competitions is on the practical outcomes rather than the learning opportunity. While the Harmonious Entrepreneurship competition is intended to create new ventures that address the sustainability challenge, it is also intended to educate the participants about Harmonious Entrepreneurship and develop in them the characteristics and behaviour of the Harmonious Entrepreneur (Kirby, 2022).

Whilst extracurricular interventions may not extend to everyone, it is clear from the results of the beta test that they can help the participating students and staff broaden and deepen their learning as Lipscombe et al. (2008) have acknowledged. Initially, the participants may be extrinsically motivated by the prizes on offer but, on the evidence presented here, once involved they become intrinsically motivated and enjoy learning in a community of “respect and trust”. However, the outcomes would

suggest that the teams should be student led – that they should be formed naturally by the students and not “created” artificially by the mentors.

Recommendations stemming from the beta-test are for: -

Student participants to:

- Grasp the competition's objectives and guidelines, ensuring familiarity with online literature and resources.
- Strategically form teams to encompass a diverse skill set and experience, rather than simply teaming up with friends.
- Adhere to deadlines, consistently delivering as required.
- Embrace feedback, reflecting on the learning journey and skills honed.
- Seek clarity and assistance when in doubt about tasks or procedures.

Educators/Mentors to:

- Ensure their teams comprehend the competition's prerequisites and available resources.
- Promote creative problem-solving, reflection, and identification of learning requirements.
- Aid in devising work plans, rehearsing pitches, and reviewing feedback.
- Support venture launch plans and introduce teams to the university's startup ecosystem.
- Facilitate interactions with the judging panel, joining meetings when feasible.
- Oversee any utilisation of grant funding.

University Ecosystem and Providers to:

- Recognise students' potential to commercialise their intellectual property, introducing policies that support and reward them.
- Offer dedicated spaces for venture development, including prototyping.
- Ensure access to specialised technical, commercial, and legal advice as needed.
- Consider establishing a seed fund dedicated to student-initiated startups and spinouts.

Overall, the beta test proved the effectiveness of the competition and suggested areas for improvement and the implementation process most likely to be beneficial to the participants and the planet. It demonstrates that it can attract and deliver enterprise and sustainability education to students from non-business administration backgrounds and that they can learn, experientially, not just about entrepreneurship and sustainability but how to address a sustainability problem entrepreneurially so that profit, planet and people are in harmony. In so doing such extracurricular activities can be seen to have a positive impact not just on the participants' start-up activity, but their self-confidence, motivation, and entrepreneurial skills and competence as Mason et al. (2020) have indicated. Whilst embedding extracurricular programmes into the curriculum poses challenges, as noted by Pittaway et al. (2015), revisiting curriculum design to integrate certain aspects could enhance the educational experience.

Practice Note

Generic Framework for Setting Up a Harmonious Entrepreneurship Competition:

Objective: Begin with a clear and concise objective for the competition. What do you hope to achieve? This can range from promoting sustainable practices to fostering creativity among participants.

Team Composition and Roles: Decide on the size of the teams. Involve academic or professional mentors to guide the teams. Clearly define the role of these mentors. They should act as advisers, not do the work for the participants.

Learning Outcomes: Understanding the Framework: Ensure participants grasp the basics of harmonious entrepreneurship. This includes its principles, values, and how it intertwines with sustainability.

Skills Development: Highlight the key skills participants should develop or enhance during the competition, e.g., creativity, problem-solving, leadership, communication, etc.

Experiential Learning: Emphasise hands-on experience. This could involve problem identification, idea generation, planning, and reflection on the learning experience.

Guidelines and Requirements: Clearly define competition guidelines, criteria for evaluation, deadlines, and any word or presentation limits. Provide resources or references for participants to better understand and embrace the concept of harmonious entrepreneurship.

Feedback and Iteration: Encourage participants to seek feedback from mentors, peers, and industry professionals. Allow room for iterative development, where teams can refine and develop their ideas based on feedback.

Creativity and Innovation: While it is essential to provide guidelines, ensure that they are not too restrictive. Allow participants the freedom to think outside the box and come up with innovative solutions that align with harmonious entrepreneurship principles.

Evaluation and Rewards: Decide on how the competition entries will be evaluated. This could be based on innovation, feasibility, alignment with harmonious entrepreneurship principles, and overall impact. Consider offering rewards or incentives that further promote harmonious entrepreneurship, such as internships, mentorship programmes, or funding for implementing the proposed idea.

Post-Competition Engagement: Consider how you can engage with participants after the competition. This could be in the form of workshops, networking events, or opportunities to implement their projects.

Notes

1. The Brundtland definition of Sustainability is “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”.
2. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David was formed in 2010 from The University of Wales Lampeter (the oldest University in Wales), Trinity College Carmarthen and Swansea Metropolitan University. However, its entrepreneurship education provision can be traced back to the 1980s (Kirby et al., 2022c) and it has developed domestic and international a leadership role that was recognised in 2022 when it was declared the Triple E European Entrepreneurial University of the Year by the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities.
3. The International University of Malaya-Wales was founded in 2013 as a partnership between the University of Malaya-Wales and the University of Wales. It awards dual degrees of IUMW and UWTSD and it is committed to developing students who are ready to contribute to the next industrial revolution. Its former Vice Chancellor, Tay Kay Luan, is the author of “Applying Sustainability: Principles and Practices” (Partridge Publishing, Singapore, 2019).
4. The three Malaysian teams were:
 - a. Agropro – this is an app-based business that is free to use which helps people at home and peasant farmers to build a sustainable farm.

- b. Hands of Angels - a business that tracks survivors of floods and other natural disasters who are trapped or cut off from safety. It is based on an app that the team has developed.
 - c. Miracle Makers - replaces the existing inefficient, large-scale food production system by producing and distributing cost efficient and environmentally friendly fresh microgreens and mushrooms to people living in urban areas in quantities that help reduce household food waste.
5. Numerous competitions exist but particularly Enactus and The Hult Prize. The mission of Enactus is to “*engage the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders to use innovation and business principles to improve the world*” while The Hult Prize “*challenges young people around the world to solve the planet’s most pressing issues through social entrepreneurship*”.

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